

[Alignment](#) by [Luddleston](#)

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Summary:

"There's a difference between thinking somebody is beautiful, and looking at them and wanting *passion*," Anders said. "I look at the Commander, and I'm aware she's beautiful. I look at... at some other people, and..." He rolled onto his back, and the moonlight traced the outline of the knot in his throat as he swallowed. "It's like, you look at somebody and you want to grab him, pull him in closer, shove him up against a wall and just—"

"That sounds like you want to fight him," Nathaniel remarked.

"It can be a similar feeling." Anders looked at Nathaniel again. In the dark, it was hard to tell that the brown in his eyes was almost golden.

"Have you ever felt like that?"

Nathaniel said, "I think I'm best off ignoring that."

Being around Anders leaves Nathaniel with several questions he never thought to ask about himself. Fortunately, being around Anders also leaves Nathaniel with the answer to most of them.

Alignment

Author's Note:

I played Awakening and smacked face-first into Nate/Anders, it's just how I work.

Anyhow, I have bestowed upon Nate the highest honor I can give any fictional character: demisexual

If inspiration strikes I might write pt 2 with Nathaniel bottoming instead!

The operation the Wardens were running wasn't half bad, Nathaniel grudgingly had to admit.

For an organization slapped together from the remnants of an order that had been all but wiped out in Ferelden, they were pulling through with unprecedented tenacity. Nathaniel had been in a cell for the duration of the attack on the Vigil, but the fact that the Commander of the Grey had retaken the keep from darkspawn herself, with only a single recruit at her side, was undoubtedly incredible.

Nathaniel found himself impressed with the Warden Commander based purely on reputation. He could have carried that image of her with him, but unfortunately, he met her.

Commander Georgiana Amell, Magus of the Circle, Hero of Ferelden, garnered awe but not respect. She introduced herself saying, "you can call me Georgie," and she swung open the bars to his cell without concern. She was barely an adult, and although she was indeed larger than life (taller than Nathaniel by almost a head, more solidly muscled than any mage he'd ever met) she left one wondering how in the Maker's name she managed to end a Blight.

She treated her fellow Wardens like friends, not subordinates, passing off gifts to people left and right, sitting beside them at dinner, laughing along with ribald jokes, and overall giving liberties that a commanding officer should never have. This sort of leniency from Ser Rodolphe would have left Nathaniel wondering if the man had lost his mind.

Nathaniel found it nigh-impossible this woman could be the same person who killed Rendon Howe, Teyrn Loghain, *and* an archdemon, until he saw her in battle. Here, she demanded admiration and obedience, not only because she could command a battlefield as easily as she could spout nonsensical innuendo, but because she fought just as hard and even more skillfully than anyone else. She functioned neatly within a crew of four, switching neatly from spellwork to swordplay as demanded.

Nathaniel became warier of her after that point, because it was clear that she was the most dangerous type of person: somebody who looked safe.

She was a fine mage, a fine warrior, and a disarmingly good-hearted person. Naturally, this meant Nathaniel has to be on guard around her constantly, and naturally, this meant the fucking *weasel* of a mage they'd picked up adored her.

Anders was in love with her, Nathaniel thought, as he went about the work of repairing arrows that had been damaged in their last skirmish. Or at the very least, Anders wanted in her trousers, or wanted *her* up his skirts. He was letting her look at his staff, and yes, he had already made *several* jokes about her handling his *staff*. Nathaniel couldn't roll his eyes harder.

Anders was practically in her lap, so obvious it was embarrassing. Nathaniel shared a look of commiseration with their newest recruit—rather, he tried to, but Justice was simply looking a bit perplexed with the proceedings. Oghren had already drunk himself under the table. This was a good thing, as he usually enjoyed Anders' antics, and Anders didn't need encouragement.

“Tell me, are *all* lady Wardens as gorgeous and enchanting as you are?” Anders asked Amell, leaning heavily into her side.

"I dunno, I've never met one." Amell drank from the tankard she and Anders had been sharing for no reason other than the fact that he seemed to want to put his mouth on the same cup she had. "Reportedly, there aren't many out there."

"Really?" he said, mock affront in his voice. "We ought to recruit more, then. Say, bearing that in mind, what are the rules about fraternization among the Wardens?"

She said, "I'm not sure, it's not as if they gave me a handbook—sleep with whoever you like, Anders, I won't be bothered."

There was a catlike purr in Anders' voice as he said, "you don't know what you're doing when you give me *that* option, Commander."

Nathaniel damn near snapped an arrowhead off.

Amell only laughed and clapped Anders on the back. "I do know, actually. I'm wishing you luck, which you'll sorely need."

"Indeed," Anders said, with a gusty sigh, taking the drink back from her.

He needn't *that* much luck, Nathaniel assumed, because Amell kissed him on the head before standing and stepping over the long bench that lined the dining table.

"Come along, Justice," Amell said, "I know not whether you require sleep, but I'll show you to your room anyhow."

The newest member of their crew departed with the commander, and the hall was quiet for a moment. Anders emptied his cup, and then he leaned onto the table, resting his head on crossed arms and looking at Nathaniel with the hazy, unfocused stare of someone quite drunk. He looked a little bit pathetic, with his prickly beard unevenly shaven and his ponytail drooping.

Nathaniel wasn't normally one to tease, but Anders merited it. "You know, if she's willing to abscond with a *corpse* to quit talking to you, I don't think your flirting is going over well."

Anders laughed, one sharp note. "*Ha*. And here I thought you had no sense of humor."

Nathaniel had finished adjusting the fletching on his last arrow some time ago, but he kept fiddling with it regardless. He should have taken the opportunity to escape Anders' presence, but he stayed planted in his seat. "It is generally a bad idea to sleep with your commanding officer."

"What? No way, no, *Howe*." This had the air of something he was trying to make into a pun but couldn't quite connect. "Our illustrious Commander Amell is very much *married*."

Nathaniel had been unaware of this, and he was certain it showed on his face.

"Wears a ring and everything."

"You wear rings. You have two on. *I* wear a ring," Nathaniel protested.

"Not a wedding ring, unless there's something you've neglected to tell me," Anders said. "Anyway, it's not just that. She told me. You ask her sometime, her husband's a Warden, too. Reportedly he's very handsome, although I find it quite impossible anybody's a more handsome Warden than me."

Nathaniel, with great pains, did not roll his eyes again.

However, it seemed he did not manage to be entirely quiet about his disdain, because the next thing Anders said was, "don't scoff at me! I'm incredibly attractive. And charming. I know plenty of people who'd say so."

"You know plenty of liars, then." Nathaniel slid his arrows back into his quiver, resolving to leave as soon as he was certain Anders wasn't going to drunkenly trip over loose stonework and tumble to the ground and crack open his head.

Anders stretched, rolling his shoulders dramatically, which made all those damn feathers on his pauldrons ruffle like a displeased bird puffing up. He

tugged the tie out of his hair and ran his fingers through it, making it exactly clear how greasy his hair had become. "I don't know, Howe, I think I'd be able to tell. I've a fairly good sense for when somebody is interested in me, and usually if they're letting me stick it in them, the answer is 'yes'."

Scratch that bit about making sure Anders returned to his room alright. Nathaniel swung his quiver over his shoulder and prepared to take his leave. "I don't want to hear about you lady friends, Anders," he spat.

He strode toward the exit, and didn't turn, didn't even look over his shoulder to acknowledge Anders' reply.

"And that's where you're wrong—most of them were men!"

— — —

Nathaniel was used to hunting and tracking, expeditions throughout the Free Marches. He didn't mind nature, it was just that nature wasn't usually so full of foul-smelling mud and walking trees and bandits and darkspawn.

The Wending Wood was just its own brand of terrible, it seemed.

Amell didn't mind camping here. Actually, she seemed to relish it. She happily stoked the fire while all of them laid out bedrolls, taking a deep breath of night air that only smelled a little like charred sylvan and darkspawn flesh, and remarked how nice it was that they didn't even need a tent.

Nathaniel doubted Anders would even know how to put up a tent, so he was glad if only because it meant he'd not have to help that incompetent excuse for a Warden with anything so prone to innuendo-laden commentary as *pitching a tent*.

As the moon rose, Nathaniel sat by the fire, scraping dried mud off his boots with the duller side of his hunting knife. Anders messily re-stitched the hem of his robes that had fallen loose earlier that day, while Justice contemplated the moon and stars, the death-sink of his face more obvious in the firelight.

Amell was reading a letter, holding aloft a glowing orange sphere of mage-light. It was impossible to tell what was written; even if Nathaniel wanted to try to read it through the back of the paper, the handwriting was too atrocious to be read backwards.

"Now, that *can't* be a report from Varel, because you have on far too wide of a smile," Anders said to her, "so one wonders, who *did* write the Commander of the Grey?"

"Alistair," Amell said.

"Who?" Nathaniel asked.

"Her *lover*," Anders put a disturbing lasciviousness on the word.

Nathaniel realized suddenly that he had not even asked the name of Amell's husband, and that he recognized it. "Wasn't Alistair the name of the bastard son of King Maric's they found hiding out in Redcliffe that Arl Eamon tried to put on the throne?"

"Was it?" Amell said, eyes still on the letter.

Nathaniel looked to the others for confirmation, not knowing why he even bothered with Justice.

Anders, for his part, shrugged. "I don't pay attention to politics."

"Of course you don't." Nathaniel swore that had been the name, and Amell's answer felt purposefully evasive, but Anders, it seemed, was refusing to consider this.

Anders was, instead, leaning toward Amell with what could only be described as a *leer* on his face. "So, what's he writing you about? Anything fun? I always *have* wondered how one manages to keep the romance alive when you're that far apart."

"Romantic letters are mostly useless drivel," Nathaniel said, finally prying away a clod of mud and wet grass that was stuck unpleasantly to the heel of his boot. "My sister used to receive them in droves from every lord's son in

Ferelden, each more stupid than the last." He remembered reading them aloud in silly voices with Delilah, narrating grandiose marriage proposals that were really all too much for a young girl to receive. But everybody wanted to be connected to a Howe, and so betrothals were put forth practically as soon as Delilah was born. Not so, these days. Nathaniel had to stop scraping off his boots before he gouged the leather accidentally in his irritation.

"One time, I found a note from one apprentice to another stuck between the pages of a library book I only checked out because it was large enough to hide a smaller, much more diverting book behind it when it was open," Anders said. "It was very well-written—and *extremely* raunchy—I learnt a lot about what two girls could do with one another."

Amell snorted a laugh.

"And what, pray tell, has your dear husband written?" Anders asked. "Does he tell how he longs to hold you in his arms, to press close with passion'd breath—"

"Roses," Amell said, folding the paper over and looking at Anders without the sensibility to be annoyed by his crowing. She was only smiling. "He's written about roses."

"That's lovely," Justice said, a sweet sentiment, for such a strange spirit.

Anders ruined that sentiment with, "are the roses a metaphor for—"

Nathaniel cut Anders off by flinging his knife in Anders' direction, pinning the skirt of his robes neatly to the ground below him. Anders yelped satisfyingly.

"*Thanks* for that, Howe," he groused, "now I have to sew this up, too. I ought to make you do it, ruining my clothes like that."

His clothes were already in bad shape, because his robes (Tevinter in construction but purchased in Denerim, Nathaniel recalled) were more

suited to lounging around decoratively than to tromping through woods and fighting darkspawn.

"I'd do a better job of mending them than you are, that's for sure and certain," Nathaniel said.

"Go on, then." Anders presented the needle to him with a flourish. "I'll warn you, if you poke me with that, I will scream so loud every sylvan in this forest will descend on us."

"If you're obnoxious, I'll jab you on purpose."

Amell folded the letter in half again and put it back into her pack. "Just be quiet about your squabbling, please. I'm going to sleep. I'll trust you two to handle yourselves and not to act like overgrown children."

"Fine, yes, we'll be quiet about it," Anders said, always willing to listen to Amell, even when he would have whinged about it if Nathaniel said the same thing.

And so Nathaniel ended up close enough to speak in whispers, kneeling on Anders' bedroll and lifting up his skirts, trying hard not to reveal more of Anders' leg than he needed to see but also trying to disguise this nicety, lest Anders call him delicate for it.

"I don't understand why you don't wear trousers under these," Nathaniel said, unwinding thread from the spool and snapping it with his teeth, then wetting the end between his lips. It was difficult to thread a needle in the firelight, but Nathaniel would be a poor archer if his eyesight were any worse, so he managed.

"You should be lucky I've started wearing *smallclothes* under them," Anders replied. Nathaniel hadn't pulled his robes up far enough for that to be a concern, so this was clearly just Anders trying to make Nathaniel uncomfortable on purpose.

"I'm only saying, you wouldn't get all these scratches on your legs from thorns and brambles and sylvan roots if you wore trousers," Nathaniel said,

skimming his knuckles over a still-healing scrape gently enough not to hurt, just to indicate. "Do as you will."

"I'll take it under advisement," Anders whispered.

That hush made the moment suddenly all the more intimate, and Nathaniel tugged his hand away from Anders' leg as quick as he could, knotting the end of his thread and starting on his work.

"Why are you doing it backwards?" Anders asked.

It took Nathaniel a moment to realize this was an honest question. "I'm not doing it backwards. You sew on the wrong side of the fabric so it doesn't show as obviously on the opposite side. Granted, it would be better if you had thread that matched." The undyed white cotton would no doubt stand stark against the deep blue-green of Anders' robes.

Anders hummed, watching him work. "Where did you learn to do this?"

It was a fair question. Most little boys weren't taught to sew, and it wasn't as if Arlessa Howe did any of her own mending, but even that innocuous inquiry pricked Nathaniel at his heart. "None of your business," Nathaniel said, picturing Adria's steady hand as she showed him how to fix the holes he wore in his trousers.

"You know, if you weren't so tetchy all the time, somebody might actually have a conversation with you," Anders said. "I'm only having a chat, and here you are being belligerent."

"You could, Maker willing, be quiet," Nathaniel suggested.

He could feel Anders' sigh against his temple, but he didn't look up. The tear was short, and he could have stitched it as sloppily as Anders had been doing at his hem, and had it fixed in seconds. But he wasn't one for doing things halfway. Miraculously, Anders continued to be silent, leaving Nathaniel to do as he would.

"Adria taught me," he said, eventually. "I told her I wanted to help her with her mending."

"...that's the woman who...?"

"Yes." Nathaniel knew his voice was needlessly harsh, but he couldn't keep himself even-tempered when he imagined the rotten horror of Adria's undead face. "I suppose now you understand why I don't want to talk about it."

"You know, I've always thought the world would be better if everybody followed my example and laughed at their past tragedies," Anders said.

Nathaniel remembered him joking about being woken with a kick to the head every morning, offhandedly remarking to Amell that he'd been locked in solitary confinement for the better part of a year, and that he'd undergone his Harrowing early because healers of his ilk were hard to come by and the senior enchanters would rather he not be tranquilized for his frequent escape attempts. "I don't think everybody's quite that strong, Anders," he said, coming to the end of the hole he'd torn and feeling to make sure the fabric wasn't unraveling itself further.

"Hold on, was that a *compliment*?" Anders gasped.

"Don't expect more of them." Nathaniel tied off the end of the string, snipped it with his teeth again, and only realized after that he'd had to lift Anders' skirt to his mouth to do it, and now most of Anders' pale legs were visible. He dropped the skirt back where it'd been right away.

"Complimenting a man and then *undressing* him. Nathaniel Howe, you scoundrel," Anders teased.

"Don't worry. I'll insult you extra, just so as not to lead you on." It had the usual peevishness that slipped into his voice whenever he spoke to Anders, but it only made Anders grin. *This* was a rapport Nathaniel could handle.

"I'd expect nothing less," Anders said.

— — —

Their second night in the Wending Wood, Anders plopped his bedroll right next to Nathaniel's, and, with no provocation, started chatting with him.

"What a *day*."

Nathaniel, who would have preferred to finish eating without interruption, did not answer. They'd caught and roasted a quail for dinner, and while it was a bit overdone, anything tasted delicious after a day's exertions fighting darkspawn. He'd been *magnificently* hungry lately, on top of everything. Amell said it was a side effect of the Joining, and it made dinner very important to concentrate on.

"You know, we're lucky that botanist didn't recognize me," Anders said. "I was booted out of her seminar once for trying to sneak away elfroot to use recreationally. Had she known it was me, she might've been even more murderous than that elf."

If Anders *had* to chatter to somebody, Nathaniel would much rather he selected Amell, who was looking over her map trying to figure out where said murderous elf might have gone. At least she'd had the chance to finish eating.

Anders, instead, continued. "I mean, I can't be *extremely* mad at that elf."

"Many of her people were killed," Nathaniel agreed. "I would be furious, also."

"More importantly, she's far too pretty to be mad at." Anders whistled, hunching forward and crossing his legs, his skirts hiked up so he could dab a healing poultice on his new collection of scrapes and bruises which he'd earned by continuing to not wear trousers.

"I didn't notice," Nathaniel said drily, finding it unfortunate that he'd finished eating, if only because he now had no excuse not to talk to Anders. Perhaps he could pretend to be very invested in waxing his bowstrings, although Anders knew he could do that with his eyes shut.

"You wouldn't notice a gorgeous woman if she slapped you across the face," Anders said, with undue accusation in his voice.

"I would notice *anybody* if they *assaulted me*."

Anders tugged his skirt up further to dab at a mottled bruise all down his thigh, "you know, if *I* were a dashing knight gamboling about the Free Marches, I'd have been with at least *one* girl."

"I *have*," Nathaniel said out of reflexive defense, which made Anders drop the pot of salve he was holding.

"What? Who!?" He picked up the salve, inspecting it to see if it had spilled and carrying on when it had not. "I'd have thought you're... the way you are, because you're thirty years old and still a virgin."

Amell looked up from her map to say, "don't degrade somebody for that, Anders, not everybody grew up in the Circle," making Nathaniel wonder what sort of den of debauchery the Circle was.

Asking that, however, would not dissuade Anders from discussing his sex life. If he sounded either very interested or very annoyed, Anders would become *more* curious, so he kept his tone clipped and bored. "I'm not a virgin. I just don't see the point in talking about sex. It's not that interesting."

Instead of being put off the topic of discussion, Anders looked horrified. "Of *course* it is. It's *sex*—"

"Not everybody thinks so," Nathaniel said. He certainly wasn't as versed in lovemaking as Anders seemed to always make himself out to be, but he'd slept with enough women to know he found it sort of boring, quite uncomfortable, and overall, it mostly seemed to serve as an exhausting lead-up to breaking off a relationship. "I don't really find it worth the time."

He thought Amell might be laughing.

"What are you doing wrong, then?" Anders demanded to know.

He was *sure* Amell was laughing, now.

"Why do you assume *I'm* doing something wrong? *They* always seemed quite... satisfied."

Anders cocked his head to the side, like he was thinking, which was never a good sign. "Your lady friends, you mean."

Nathaniel could feel his face get hot. "Yes."

Anders only hummed. "That's interesting, Nate, that really is," he said, and then, blessedly, he changed the subject, asking Amell if she'd help him start a rumor that Wardens had remarkable sexual stamina.

— — —

Nathaniel should have known he hadn't gotten away so easily.

Once the fire was banked and Amell was asleep and Justice was lying there with his eyes closed politely pretending to be asleep, Anders rolled over to face Nathaniel and wiggled a little bit closer to him. Nathaniel, who'd been watching Anders roll around, couldn't pretend he wasn't looking when their eyes met.

"So. I've been thinking," Anders said, which, again, was not a good sign. "The part where you say you never enjoy sex. Do you ever think that's because of the type of person you're sleeping with?"

Nathaniel should have told him to shut up, he really should have, but he was curious and he was about to pay for it. "How do you mean?"

"Have you ever been with a man?"

The question hung in the air for a long while, not because Nathaniel didn't have an answer, but because he didn't expect to be asked. "No," he said eventually. "I imagine it's quite the same, in most respects."

"Well, yes, there are some elements, but it's a matter of—listen, have you ever been attracted to somebody you've slept with?"

If, prior to this moment, Nathaniel had pictured those words coming out of Anders' mouth, he would imagine them with a sly curl of flirtation. Surprisingly, this wasn't the case. Anders presented him with nothing but an honest question as he lay there in bed, his chin rubbing against his folded arms and making his stubble scratch a little in the midnight quiet.

"They were all beautiful," Nathaniel said.

"Yes, but there's a difference between thinking somebody is beautiful, and looking at them and wanting *passion*," Anders said. "I look at the Commander, and I'm aware she's beautiful. I look at... at some other people, and..." He rolled onto his back, and the moonlight traced the outline of the knot in his throat as he swallowed. "It's like, you look at somebody and you want to grab him, pull him in closer, shove him up against a wall and just—"

"That sounds like you want to fight him," Nathaniel remarked.

"It can be a similar feeling." Anders looked at Nathaniel again. In the dark, it was hard to tell that the brown in his eyes was almost golden. "Have you ever felt like that?"

Nathaniel said, "I think I'm best off ignoring that."

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All the way back to the Keep, Anders flirted with Velanna.

One would think that after the day they'd had (captured by darkspawn, stripped of their belongings, attacked by dragons and spit out of a tunnel) Anders would be a bit more somber, but no.

"She's gonna kill him," Amell said, through gritted teeth. "She's gonna murder him, and then we won't have a decent healer."

"Maybe Justice could go into his body," Nathaniel suggested. "Might make Anders a bit more pleasant."

"I think," Justice said, "it is better simply to prevent him from irritating her to the point of violence, instead."

Amell gave a sharp nod. "Probably. Anders! Take up the rear, I'll lead us on!" She hurried off to trade places with him. Nathaniel trusted that if anybody could convince Velanna not to simply desert the team at this point, it would be Amell.

"Of course, I'm *amazing* at bringing up the rear," Anders said over his shoulder in Velanna's direction, oozing flirtation. Nathaniel wanted to throw him as far as he could *away* from Velanna. "Hey, look, my favorite Howe and my favorite... spirit of Justice inhabiting a dead Warden."

"Do you know many spirits of Justice inhabiting dead Wardens?" asked said spirit of Justice, who had developed a sense of humor.

"No, but I don't know any other Howes, either, and I'm still sure Nathaniel is my most favorite one," Anders said. He was a little bit breathless from trying to hurry after Velanna, who was all but running away from him.

"What a coincidence. You're my *least* favorite apostate, right now," Nathaniel said.

"What? What've I done?"

"That's *no* way to talk to a lady." Nathaniel was being even pricklier than usual, and he knew it. "Didn't they teach you manners at your Circle?"

"You know, I think they tried, but there was this fellow in my class who was very handsome, and so I was quite focused—"

"Do you even *realize* how shallow you sound?" Nathaniel hissed, wanting to grab him by those scruffy pauldrons and shake him. "How *inane*? That girl just lost her sister to the darkspawn in the worst possible way, and you're asking her how she *avoids getting mosquito bites on her chest if her shirt is open like that*."

"Well, yes." Anders planted the butt of his staff into the ground as he hopped up the little hill they came across, falling into step beside Nathaniel. "If she's threatening to rip all my limbs off for commenting on her chest, then she's not thinking about her sister being poisoned and recruited by some sort of high-functioning darkspawn to be a part of his cursed army."

"That's not *helping*. That doesn't help everybody. You always think everyone out there feels the same way you do—"

"My experiences are surprisingly universal."

"I am going to throttle you," Nathaniel grumbled. Anders slipped and nearly fell down the hill, but Nathaniel grabbed the collar of his robes like he was holding a kitten by its scruff.

"Joke's on you," Anders said, "I get off on being throttled."

— — —

Nathaniel didn't often spend time in the library at Vigil's Keep, because it was a place he'd been told to stay out of as a boy. After reuniting with Delilah, though, he was in a strange mood. The tumult of belated anger at his father and joy at meeting his sister again raged around him, and all he could think to do was let it run its course while he looked through the library for a few of Delilah's favorite books to take to her in town.

And then there were footsteps behind him. And Nathaniel, because he had somehow become entranced by the most terrible of fools, knew exactly who they belonged to.

He'd been thinking too much about Anders, of late. That late-night conversation in the Wending Wood had lasted all of minutes, and it was haunting him. All Nathaniel's prickly irritation with Anders had been reframed to something salacious. He didn't want Anders. He *didn't*.

Oh, Maker, he wanted him terribly.

Because it wasn't just that night. It was Anders grinning at him over the table, it was Anders teasing him about not wearing smallclothes, it was that tone of voice Anders got when he was flirting and how ridiculously often he'd turned it on Nathaniel of late. Just yesterday, he'd been trying to point out possible flaws in Anders' escape attempts from the Circle, and all Anders had done was *flirt*.

When Nathaniel thought of loving a woman, his heart twisted and pounded, but it was a gut-deep fear. He thought that was what everybody felt, until his anxiety got spiked with *lust*, and he realized he'd never actually felt this sort of desire in his life.

"You know, I looked all over for you," Anders said. "I checked the archery range *twice*."

Nathaniel added another book to the stack in his arms. "You've found me. What for?"

"Needed somebody to irritate." Anders tugged at a strap on his armor. "I've never seen you wear all this before, you look handsome."

The black leathers were new. Nathaniel was not ashamed to admit that when Amell told him they would look for Delilah on their trip into Amaranthine today, he'd gotten dressed up. "Somebody told me black would look flattering on me," he said.

Anders grinned crookedly. "No, I told you black would suit your broody personality. That's a *bad* thing, Nathaniel. Nobody likes someone who sulks all the time, even if Oghren says it must do you well with the ladies."

"And with Oghren, it seems." Nathaniel was used to this back-and-forth, the flow of banter they worked their way into every conversation. Repeating old jokes shared between their little party of Wardens was always guaranteed to get Anders to laugh.

"Worked on *me*," Anders said, stepping forward until his chest hit the stack of books Nathaniel was still holding between them.

"Don't," Nathaniel said.

"Hm?"

"Don't do that. I know you flirt with Amell, that it's just a thing you two do as *friends*, but leave me out of it." He wished his voice didn't turn into so much of a snarl there.

"Why not?" Anders lifted the stack of books out of Nathaniel's hands. Nathaniel let him.

"Because I don't want you to."

"Why *not*?" Anders repeated, setting the books on a chair that rested beneath the window. Outside, rain was starting to come down.

"Do you need a reason?" Nathaniel tried to snap at him, he really did, but his voice fell flat, because Anders moved back into his space, and there was nothing but empty air in the gap between their bodies.

"Yes," Anders said. "Because there's a difference between, 'Anders, I've thought about it and I'm interested in women so it makes me uncomfortable when a man flirts with me,' and, 'Anders, I've just decided I'm not attracted to *you*, you're just annoying,' and, 'Anders, you're so handsome and I'm so overcome—"

"How about, Anders, I know you flirt with all your friends and I can't stand you teasing endlessly with no follow-through?"

One of Anders' brows rose. "Oh, so you're past the part where you don't know if you like men, then."

"I don't know," Nathaniel said, frustration bubbling in him. "I've never tried."

"Want to?"

"I don't *know*," Nathaniel said, a helplessness he'd normally be disdainful of cutting through his voice. "Not if you're fucking teasing me."

“I’m not teasing you.” Anders took a step forward and ate up the remainder of the distance between them. Standing chest-to-chest with the man, Nathaniel realized Anders was taller than him. “I’m flirting. There’s a difference. Flirting is an invitation to flirt back.”

“I’m not very good at that.”

“Not when you’re trying, no.” Every breath Anders took pressed into Nathaniel’s own chest. “But when you’re not trying too hard, you’re quite charming.”

“I—“ he swallowed. “I don’t know what to— *Anders*, could you just—?”

He wasn’t sure how that collection of words turned into anything solid, but Anders worked it out. He clasped Nathaniel’s face in his hands, tipped his head, and brought their mouths together.

Nathaniel thought he’d had enough kisses to know what one was, but he found he’d been mistaken. The way Anders kissed was just as infuriating as the way he flirted. He pulled back just as soon as he pressed forward, so flighty and brief in his kisses that Nathaniel was forced to chase, and only then did he realize Anders had been *luring* him, drawing him forward with that little trick of his lips. Nathaniel, as always with him, rose to the bait.

Kissing Anders was no different from any other kiss Nathaniel had ever received, and yet it was completely new in that it was *Anders*, and Nathaniel knew him well enough to like him, and liked him well enough to kiss him. He recognized the feeling of the heavy silk of Anders’ robes (impractical, so impractical) under his hands, the tickle of feathers against his neck and his earlobe as Anders wrapped an arm around his shoulders, all the familiar pieces that made him.

Nathaniel clasped the back of Anders’ neck to hold him in place, hoping he’d quit the infuriating *teasing*, and Anders laughed against his lips, but stayed put. Nathaniel knew he’d stay put, because Anders was surprisingly willing to do anything for Nathaniel if he asked honestly, and there was nothing more honest than a clammy palm begging him closer.

Nathaniel's heart spun. This, he realized, was the culmination of every moment he'd looked at Anders a little too long and a burr of feeling had hooked into the facade of disinterest he wore. It was pleasure, and then suddenly it was *passion*. Nathaniel could not bear to hold in the soft gasping of his breath where normally there was stoic silence. Anders did not seem bothered by this—if anything, it spurred him to more.

Passion became *desire*, and then *desire* became *need*, a hot, present need, the crux of which was firmly between Nathaniel's legs. And Anders', if what he could feel pressed against his hip was any indication.

They were in the middle of a *library*, hardly the place to do any of this, but lust, it seemed, made people do stupid things, and Nathaniel, it seemed, was no longer above all those stupid things. Not with every breath out of Anders' nose hot against his cheek, every flirtation of his tongue wet against Nathaniel's lips. The sound of Anders kissing him was so present in the forefront of his mind, he'd be hard pressed to hear anything else. The walls of the Vigil could crumble, and Nathaniel wouldn't notice.

This was why, when Varel said, "*gentlemen*," it bore the sort of exasperation that said this was possibly the third or even fourth time he'd called out to them.

"Seneschal," Anders said, as if he had not just been caught fervently pressing another Warden against a bookshelf and kissing him stupid. "Did you need a book? Can't say I took you for much of a reader, but—"

Varel held up a hand. "The Warden-Commander requests your presence in the armory."

Anders opened his mouth, and looked as if he might protest, so Nathaniel said, "right away, Ser," before he could.

"Good." Varel cleared his throat, clasping gauntleted hands behind his back. "I'll take my leave and trust you to meet her, then."

As soon as he left, Anders tried to kiss Nathaniel again, stopping only when Nathaniel made a sharp noise.

"Did you not hear him?"

"Surely we have time." Anders' thigh went between Nathaniel's legs.

"We do *not*. And this is a library, we're not about to—let's just go." He disentangled himself from Anders, feeling instantly cooler without a heated body pressed to his.

"Wouldn't be the first I've done it in a library," Anders said, smoothing out his skirts and following after Nathaniel. "But I suppose we do each have perfectly serviceable bedrooms in which to kiss one another all over, once we're done with whatever the Commander wishes."

"You want to—" Nathaniel lost his words, wet his lips, and tried once more. "You want to do that again?"

"Oh, Nathaniel." Anders cornered him suspiciously well for somebody used to fighting from a distance, pressing fully against him in the darkness of the library's heavy doorframe. "I want to do so much more than kiss you."

There was time to kiss him once more before the Warden Commander would expect them. Perhaps even twice.

— — —

Nathaniel had never liked heights. He was truthful in telling the group that a bad fall had put him off them as a boy. The rickety staircases and bridges over the mines at Knotwood Hills made his heart race faster than they should have and his gut twist uncomfortably, but he could grit his teeth, resolve himself not to look down, and cross them.

Anders couldn't cross his bridges quite so easily.

They were only a short ways into the dwarven fortress that was now a darkspawn fortress, a Legionnaire in tow, when Anders said to Amell, "I don't suppose it's a good time to mention I'm claustrophobic?"

"We'll see you through it," Amell said. "Just focus on the road ahead."

They fought through room after room of darkspawn, and then dwarven ghosts, and then more darkspawn. By the time they found a spot of peace, in a room with a forge where an automated golem was repairing some bits of broken armor and weapons Amell had picked up because she was nothing if not a magpie, Anders was looking particularly pale and drawn.

"Are you alright?" Nathaniel asked him quietly.

Anders did not look at him. He blinked several times; Nathaniel could see his lashes turn gold in the forge-light. "No," he said, his voice even more a rasp than Nathaniel's was. "No, I am not alright. Not right now, it's alright when we're fighting, but when my mind is left to its own devices... I don't like—I don't like being places that are windowless and underground and *closed in*."

Sigrun, the newest member of their little party, only snorted. "That's the whole Deep Roads, buddy. Here, want something to eat?"

"No." Anders rubbed his nose with his sleeve, then hunched down into his robes like he was hiding in them. "My stomach is already being disagreeable enough."

Nathaniel crouched beside Anders, putting a hand on his shoulder. "What do you need?" Nathaniel asked.

"Don't touch me," Anders gasped, and then sort of curled in on himself, pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes. "Just. I don't know what I need, but I need you not to touch me. It feels like everything is closing in—keep talking, it's good to know you're there, I just need... just don't touch."

"Alright." Nathaniel put his hands in his lap instead. "What am I meant to talk about?"

"Whatever you like, I suppose," Anders said, his face still in his hands. "Tell me a story, maybe, I dunno."

Nathaniel was not the sort of man who was brimming with stories. Not even a little. He didn't remember the sorts of tales bards told, and he didn't enjoy

sharing any of his own. "I'm no good with stories. Sigrun, maybe—"

"You were a knight, right? Tell me about that." Anders sounded almost desperate, almost hysterical.

Nathaniel *really* didn't like sharing his own stories, but if there was something he could do to soothe that wound, he had to try, right? It was discomfiting to see his normally flippant colleague—friend—*lover* like this, and so Nathaniel took a breath, cleared his throat, and began.

The longer he spoke, the more Anders' shoulders lowered and his breathing evened. He gave no reply to anything Nathaniel said, so it was clear that his relief was not so much related to the words Nathaniel spoke, but the quality of his voice, itself. Anders had told him once that he sounded like a shriek slashed his throat open at some point and it had been poorly healed, but in the same breath had said it was a handsome voice, so Nathaniel couldn't quite tell how Anders felt about it.

All he knew was that by the time Amell came to tell them it was time to move on, Anders' breathing was steady.

— — —

Nathaniel knew Anders was in a better mood when he started complaining.

"We're going to die in here. In the depths of the tunnels with only childer grubs to mourn us, and instead of performing a proper funeral, they'll feast on our flesh."

It should have been annoying, but compared to his white-knuckled silence, it was reassuring.

"I'm never going to know the satisfaction of a day in the sun again. I'll never get to enjoy the sound lightning makes inside templar armor." He turned to Nathaniel to point his next comment very specifically: "nobody is ever going to take me to a nice warm bed, push me over and tear all my clothes off—"

“*That’s* enough,” Nathaniel snapped. He’d fucked up stringing his bow in a way he hadn’t in ages, the string sliding down the arm of it, and he wasn’t sure whether he was more irritated with the bowstring or with Anders.

— — —

It was impossible to tell how much time had passed, but they needed to camp just to sleep and eat. They staked out a little area against the cave walls, one of the few spots where there wasn’t anything fleshy growing out of the stone, and Amell set up a little campfire, using more magic than tinder to keep it burning.

Nathaniel could sense the presence of the darkspawn, now, and knew there was enough distance that they wouldn’t be noticed in their little corner of the cave, but he felt the need to scout the perimeter anyhow. He was going through another wide tunnel when Anders appeared, only to press him back against the wall and kiss him square on his mouth.

“What—?”

“We could both die. At literally any moment,” Anders said. “I’m quite through with wasting time.”

His mouth tasted like the heavy spices in the cured meat they’d brought as travel rations.

“I’m not fucking you in the Deep Roads,” Nathaniel said, jerking his head back to separate them.

He had no room to step back, though, which meant Anders was still pressed just as firmly against his front. “Come now, Nathaniel, we can’t be the first Wardens to do as much. And who *knows* what those Legionnaires are doing down here.” Even under the grit on his hands and through the damp press of his robes, covered with just as much unspeakable filth as Nathaniel was, Anders was temptation incarnate.

Nathaniel couldn’t say for certain how long or how much it would take for him to acquiesce, but he knew, to the core of him, that Anders *could*

convince him.

If it hadn't been for the tentacles bursting from the floor all around them, that is.

— — —

Kal'Hirol wasn't the sort of dirt that came off easily. Nathaniel found this out when he still felt scummy after his second bath. A third bath, thankfully, seemed to be enough, and he was relaxing in the water when the door to his bedroom creaked open.

"I'm surprised you didn't lock that, given how generally... paranoid you seem to be."

"I thought about rigging a trip wire, but I didn't think the Commander would appreciate if someone triggered it and the doorframe got singed." Nathaniel didn't bother opening his eyes. "I left it open tonight."

He could hear Anders' voice get closer. "For me?"

Nathaniel scrubbed his hand over his face, where his facial hair was prickling and unkempt after so long neglecting to shave while they were underground. "For you."

"One moment." Anders' footsteps retreated, and Nathaniel could hear the bolt sliding shut. "Should have done that earlier."

He managed to hide his smile and open his eyes before Anders came back.

Anders wasn't wearing the usual robes. Probably they'd been ruined. This new set was a bit more sensible, styled like the Wardens' armor, but unlike the set of robes he'd seen the Commander wear while she was out of armor, Anders' had a skirt.

You can take the mage out of the tower, Nathaniel thought, but apparently you cannot make him wear trousers.

“What are you smirking about?” Anders asked, lowering himself to sit on the edge of the tub. He rubbed his thumb against a groove in the carved rock of the bath.

“Wondering if you’ve got smallclothes under the robes, now,” Nathaniel said.

“Well.” Anders trailed his fingers through the water, then dragged wet fingertips over Nathaniel’s chest and through the hair there. “I wouldn’t be opposed to you finding out.”

The water sloshed as Nathaniel sat up fully, grasping for the skirt of Anders’ robes. His wet palm darkened the fabric from blue to near-black as he pulled it up and slipped his hand beneath, holding Anders’ gaze all the while. He skimmed his palm up Anders’ leg and over his naked hip.

“I ought not to be surprised, yes?”

“Get out of the water, Nate,” Anders said. “Or I’m going to turn it all chilly on you.” He cupped a little swirl of ice magic in one hand, a tiny force that, Nathaniel knew, could become a massive blizzard.

“You wouldn’t dare,” Nathaniel said, but he did not test that theory.

He stood, not feeling shy of his nudity, but perhaps more conscious of it, in a way he’d not been when the surface of the water still distorted his frame. Maybe it was thanks to the way Anders’ eyes flicked over him, the way the corner of his mouth turned up.

“Planning to hand me my towel, or are you going to bide your time until I air dry? I’m not getting into bed soaking wet,” Nathaniel said.

Anders didn’t simply hand him his towel, he dried him off, moving more slowly and carefully over every inch of Nathaniel’s body than Nathaniel ever had himself.

“This healed up alright,” he said, referring to the pink marks where there’d been a burn from that flaming golem they fought. “Does it hurt?”

“Not anymore,” Nathaniel said. “Playing a bit coy, aren’t you, Anders?”

“I’ll confess,” Anders murmured, his eyes downturned so Nathaniel only saw the golden sweep of his lashes and the speckling of freckles on his browbone, “I’m not quite used to *talking* before these things. Not used to having limitless time and a closed room with a door that locks, either.”

“What are you used to, then?” Nathaniel asked, “if it would make you more comfortable—“

Anders put a hand in his wet hair and pulled him in for a kiss. He wasn’t teasing or slow or playful about it, he was forceful, a sudden heat and passion with no build-up. It was hard to keep up with him.

“That’s what I’m used to,” Anders said. “But I think I’d like you to take your time with me.”

Nathaniel pressed one hand into the small of Anders’ back, drawing him close. Even through his robes he could feel the knots of his spine. “I don’t usually take my time, either,” Nathaniel said. “Not the way I really want to, anyway.” Once, he and several other young men in Kirkwall went to a brothel, and Nathaniel was teased for using up so much time. *‘You pay them by the hour, you know. I hope at least you got your money’s worth.’*

He’d drawn things out because he was so anxious, she had to give him a massage to calm him down first. So, no, that wasn’t quite used to taking his time how he wanted.

“We have all night,” Anders said. “I know you don’t sleep.”

“I sleep.”

“Then whatever are those circles under your eyes for?”

“They enhance the dark, brooding, mysterious look,” Nathaniel said. “A handsome man once told me.”

Anders grinned, probably remembering the occasion he’d said it. “Take me to your bed, Nathaniel. Show me what you can do with me all night.”

“Sound less like you’re playing a whore in some Orlesian comedy, and I’ll consider it.” Nathaniel dropped the towel to the ground and walked to his bed with Anders trailing him, going directly against any kind of front he might put on.

“Hey, I learned from some of the best,” Anders said.

Nathaniel heard the rustle of him unbuckling his belt and he made a sharp noise to stop Anders in his tracks. “Let me.”

“Unfair. I didn’t get to take your clothes off.”

“Yes, but you did get to towel me off, which was much more like feeling me up.” He sat on the bed and tugged Anders forward by his belt, finishing the work Anders had started and pulling it loose.

Nathaniel had undressed women before. He remembered his first, a daughter of a Marcher noble. He’d taken her clothes off like he was unwrapping a gift and did not want to tear the paper. Beneath her fine gown, she’d been so soft and delicate, he was even more worried about bruising her.

Anders was nothing like this. He goaded Nathaniel with, “don’t treat me like such a delicate fucking flower, Howe, you don’t have to pluck me like a bowstring—“

“That’s not how bowstrings work.”

The robes came off much faster after that, with some wrestling and a snarl that he worried over for just a second before Anders moaned. Apparently his goading was not without purpose.

When Nathaniel pinned Anders down, Anders cried, “yes!” and arched into him, his amber eyes turning to fire.

Naked and horizontal was much better than clothed and vertical, and Anders found Nathaniel’s mouth again and stole a hot kiss from him.

“What do you want of me?” Nathaniel asked.

“Oh— *oh*, I’m easy,” Anders said. The ‘*oh*’ was because Nathaniel pressed down on his chest to keep him flat to the bed, so he couldn’t stretch up, kiss Nathaniel, and distract him. “What do you want to do with me, exactly?”

The problem was that he didn’t quite know. The problem which followed, then, was that he was never admitting to Anders in a thousand years that he didn’t quite know what to do with a naked man in his bed.

Nathaniel did what he always did when he didn’t know what to do with Anders: he snapped at him. “Well, I’m not about to let you *stick it in me*.”

“Didn’t figure you would, on the first go-round. You need not worry, I’m versatile.” He smirked like he knew exactly why Nathaniel was being irritable. Prick. “Want me to sit on your cock, instead?”

And just like that, the words not quite as salacious as when Anders was teasing but just as intriguing, the mood was reignited. Nathaniel found himself butting up against the staggering realization that Anders might be as good at this as he boasted. Or at the very least, Anders knew how to work Nathaniel’s hunger for him to his advantage.

“Yeah,” Nathaniel said, unable to stop from moving against him once more. “I want that.”

“Good,” Anders said, pushing at his shoulder. “Lie on your back at the head of the bed, there. You should be grateful, I don’t normally offer to do this much of the work.”

“I thought you didn’t normally have sex with somebody in a bed. I’m not sure where... what was it you said? ‘Quick trysts in dark corners’ involves this particular act.”

“Ah, you have caught the holes in the plot of my sensual banter,” Anders sighed. “You’re right, I don’t do this often. All the more reason to thank me!”

“You just want to hear me thank you, don’t you?”

“I’ll admit to some desire on my part. You have a pretty voice, Nathaniel.” Anders reached over the side of his bed for his robes, digging through the pockets for a little glass bottle that looked like the sort used for lyrium potions. The contents weren’t blue and glowing, though, just an ordinary oil of some kind.

“I do not,” Nathaniel said.

“Hush, I’m attempting to *compliment* you.” Anders sat astride Nathaniel’s hips, tantalizingly close, opening the bottle so he could pour some into his palm. He looked down over Nathaniel as he did, his eyes moving slowly.

Nathaniel didn’t like the feeling of being watched, and so, in the name of distracting Anders, he skirted a hand up Anders’ thigh and finally to his cock, giving him a long, slow stroke.

“Oh—there’s a good man, keep that up,” Anders said. Ordinarily, Nathaniel would stop just to be contrarian, but he liked the soft, pleased tone of Anders’ voice, and the praise in his words. “You know, I was expecting you to look good under the armor, but this...”

“Go on,” Nathaniel said. “I’m not going to halt your attempts to compliment me any more.”

“You’re exemplary,” Anders said. “I’m pretty sure you’re the storied ideal of Ferelden manhood.”

“Now I know you’re exaggerating.”

“I’m not! You’re so hairy, I bet all the other knights were jealous.”

“What?”

Anders ran his fingers up Nathaniel’s stomach and his chest, yes, through his hair. “You’re like a bear.”

“Shut up.”

“Sorry, I got a bit distracted. Right. Keep touching my cock while I get ready.”

“Right. Get ready?” He followed Anders’ instructions, just gently, toying with him, figuring Anders deserved a bit of teasing.

“You really *have* never done this before, right. Well, you need a good bit of oil to make things slicker,” Anders said, reaching around behind himself, and... Maker, what was he doing with his fingers? “And you’re a bit thick, so I need to ease myself into it with my—ah, *fuck*, it been a while—with my fingers.”

His free hand smacked against Nathaniel’s chest, where he braced himself, and choked on a noise that sounded nearer to pain than pleasure. Nathaniel was struck by a sudden fool urge to *comfort* Anders, and he rested his hand over Anders’, stroking gently back and forth, trying to watch his expression but unable to see when his face dropped and his hair hung in the way.

Nathaniel cupped Anders’ face and tilted it forward to see him better. He was smiling now, his lower lip caught between his teeth.

“Does it hurt?” Nathaniel asked.

“Such a gentleman, you are. No, it’s really—so good.”

“Do you even still need me to touch you, I wonder?” Nathaniel dropped his hand from Anders’ cheek and trailed his knuckles along the length of his cock instead.

“Don’t you dare stop.”

Anders, it seemed, still inspired some pettiness in Nathaniel even when he was responsible for his pleasure, and Nathaniel lifted his hand from Anders’ cock just to tease. He passed his palm over Anders’ belly instead, delighting in his soft growl of frustration.

“Fine,” Anders said, “you want to play dirty, I can, too. Tell me you want me to fuck myself on your cock, Nathaniel.”

This, in some way, was teasing him. Anders knew Nathaniel's ingrained proclivity for polite speech, and had teased him before for the fact that he rarely cursed. He wanted to hear him say something so dirty simply because he thought it was novel.

"I thought we had already established I want you to ride me," Nathaniel said.

"Doesn't mean I don't want to hear it. Would you rather I wait 'til you beg?"

"You might as well leave my bed, if that's the case," Nathaniel scoffed.

There was a frown that flickered across Anders' face, a minute expression that passed on fear and doubt Nathaniel never knew Anders had.

"Anders," he said, skimming his hands over the curve of Anders' hip bones, the slight softness of his waistline. "Do you worry I don't want you the way you want me? Because I do. Desperately so. I want you so terribly it's a *nuisance*. This... isn't how I usually feel, for anybody. Forgive me, but I lack the words to tell you properly, and it's not in my nature to be so vulgar."

"You do say such pretty things." Anders sighed, pulling his fingers free, wiping them on Nathaniel's discarded towel.

"Come here," Nathaniel said, squeezing where he still held Anders. "Show me what it's like to be with somebody you want so incredibly it becomes a *need*."

"That'll do," Anders said, pouring more of the oil into his palm. "That'll do nicely, love."

He stroked Nathaniel's cock, moving slow and firm, delight flitting across his face as Nathaniel pushed into his grip. He couldn't help it. Anders had nice hands.

If he thought *that* was good, Anders sinking down onto his cock was incomparably better. He didn't want to close his eyes—if wasn't looking at Anders it might feel like anybody else, but even when his eyes did roll closed (of their own accord— *by all that is holy*, he felt good) that wasn't the case.

It was so clearly Anders' hands on his stomach, it was so clearly Anders' voice making soft, broken noises above him, and *Anders* was who Nathaniel wanted.

He felt Anders' breath on his cheek a second before he felt Anders' mouth on his. Then he clutched Anders close to him, moved with him, tangled with him everywhere he could. It was as if they would never be unwound.

"*Fuck*, that feels good," Anders said. "It's been so long since I've been fucked, I forgot how much I like it."

"You... you do this often, then?" Nathaniel couldn't imagine how it felt.

"Not as often as I'd like."

"Tart."

"Indeed," Anders said, rocking on top of him, *bouncing* a little, even. "You think *this* is whorish of me, imagine how it gets when there's two men. I like to be stuffed from both ends."

Nathaniel wanted to pull on that dirty tongue of his, like tugging his ponytail. He settled for nipping, instead. His hands were busy. One was around Anders' cock, not really stroking him, just letting Anders thrust into his hand. The other pressed against Anders' lower back, feeling him flex and sweat as he fucked.

"You don't need two men for that," Nathaniel said.

"Mm?"

"Could put my prick in your mouth and my fingers in your arse, couldn't I? Both. Ends." He was fucking Anders as much as Anders was fucking

himself, rocking up into the tight clutch of his body.

“Ah! That’s—well—I’ll understand the practicalities of that when I’m not — *sofuckingclose*— Nathaniel if you stop I will light your bed on fire.”

Nathaniel hadn’t planned to stop, didn’t *want* to stop. But Anders piqued Nathaniel’s antagonistic side at the best of times, clearly. Nathaniel was too fond of the idea of annoying him *not* to stop.

“*Nathaniel!*” Anders cried, less pleasure and more rage. “Fuck. Me. You. *Absolute bastard.*” He kept rocking on Nathaniel’s cock, moving slower, as if his thighs were starting to ache.

He would have teased Anders longer, but Maker, he longed to sink into that heat again. He grasped Anders’ hips tight and pushed back in, fucking him as hard as he could, given the position and lack of leverage. The noises of pleasure spilling from Anders were encouragement, indeed. Anders’ hand took over where Nathaniel had left off, stroking himself almost at the same pace Nathaniel fucked him.

“Next time we do this, I’m going to put you on your back and *take you*. You can take it harder than this, can’t you?”

“Yes yes yes yes, I’m— *oh*, like that. Don’t stop.”

This time, he didn’t. Anders was flushed all the way down his chest, begging for every hot thrust in, the rhythm of his hand never slowing.

If Nathaniel *could* fuck the words out of Anders, he wasn’t managing it this time. It was all mostly nonsense and cursing, but it never ended.

Not even when Anders spilled all over Nathaniel’s stomach, saying, “oh, fuck, oh, *fuck, Nathaniel—!*”

Making somebody else come had never been quite so arousing for Nathaniel himself. He made a low, frustrated noise when Anders pulled up and off him, and Anders only laughed, collapsing at his side.

“Don’t worry, I’m not gonna leave you unsatisfied,” Anders said. “You want me to touch you?”

“Yes,” Nathaniel said, turning his head toward Anders, getting closer to him as he was able. He was rewarded with a kiss, and with Anders’ hand around his cock.

“You know,” Anders said, quiet, conspiratorial, “I knew it’d be good, but I didn’t realize you had *that* in you.”

Nathaniel laughed, breathless and stupid with how much he wanted to come.

“Thought I had it bad for you before,” Anders thumbed the head of his cock, drinking in his moan, “I’m never leaving your bedroom, now. Not ‘til you fuck me on every surface in every position we can think of.”

“Not ‘til— *ah*— not ‘til you fuck me, too.”

Anders grinned, and Nathaniel could see sore red on his lower lip where he’d been kissed and nipped. “You’d let me?”

He nodded, honest in his lust.

“Even more reason to stay here forever,” Anders said. “I’ll make it good for you, Nate. I’ll make it so good.”

“*Ngh!*”

“Come on, love.”

“*Anders—!*”

Anders stroked him through his orgasm, kissing his neck and scraping his teeth along the path of the muscle there, only releasing him once he was spent. Then, Anders pushed Nathaniel firmly onto his back, straddling him again just to kiss him, thorough and messy, with enthusiasm Nathaniel was helpless to match.

When Anders finally pulled back, he spared a glance between them. “We need another bath.”

“Ugh,” said Nathaniel.

“I’ll warm up your bathwater for you if you wash my hair for me,” he bargained.

“Why? You didn’t get any in your hair. Did you?”

Anders slipped off him and stood, holding out a hand as if he was escorting a maiden from a carriage. “No, but it’s pleasant to have somebody do for you.”

“Fine,” Nathaniel said, “your hair’s always so greasy, anyhow. You never wash it enough, yourself.”

“My hair is perfected, I take offense!” Anders said, but the affront must have been in jest, because he had turned the water warm enough to steam.

Slipping into that bath almost felt better than the sex.

Anders sat between Nathaniel’s legs, letting him wash his hair, which mostly seemed to involve Nathaniel massaging his scalp while Anders slowly turned into a puddle. He was quiet, for once, just letting the both of them breathe.

Anders collapsed blissfully on Nathaniel’s shoulder, his fingertips tracing little ripples in the water’s surface and keeping it warm. “Did you mean it?” he asked.

“Mean what?” Nathaniel was considering running wet fingertips over Anders’ shoulders and tracing a line between his freckles. He wasn’t certain he had that liberty, given what they were... considering what they *weren’t*.

“About wanting me to fuck you,” Anders clarified. “You know, sometimes you just *say things* on the brink of orgasm, and who knows if you mean them, and I just wanted to make sure you— *ahem*. Actually wanted it.”

Nathaniel did touch his shoulder, then, just how he'd wanted to. "Yes. I just... it seemed like you enjoyed it, and I thought it might feel good."

"It does," Anders said. "Although... I suppose not everyone likes it. So you may not."

Nathaniel could feel the smile creeping onto his lips. "Anders, I'm impressed. I didn't think I'd see the day you admitted someone else's tastes may not align to your own."

Anders laughed, smacking him in the hand, but then tangling their fingers together. "Your tastes often don't align to mine, it seems," he said. "At least we've compatible opinions on enough things, though."

"Where it counts," Nathaniel agreed. "You're still wrong about most things."

Anders turned his head for a kiss, and to prove that he'd found quite a simple way to distract Nathaniel from this and any other disagreement.

Author's Note:

If you want to see whatever I'm drawing of these two, visit my tumblr [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to experience me being a nerd about classics, visit me on Twitter [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to see all that but horny, I invite you to my NSFW twitter [@luddlessmut](#)